



The Virginia Saltwater Review

*Plans and Statistics Department
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Newport News, VA 23607-0756
<http://www.mrc.virginia.gov>*

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by

Department of Plans and Statistics, Fisheries Management Division

OVERVIEW

The forecast is variable for the next few days. Winds, from the north Saturday, then the south Sunday. Some sun, some clouds, some rain. What was that saying “April showers brings May flowers?”...what about bringing some light winds, calm seas, and tight lines? For those that have been able to get out this past week, there has been some impressive catches. THE DRUM BITE IS ON! Red drum, black drum, go for either or both, but Bouys 13 and 16, Fisherman’s Island Inlet, and Nine Foot Shoals are all hotspots. We’ve seen photos from the big boats and from the small ‘yaks’ (kayakers), and all have impressive catches and those silly grins of satisfaction (the anglers, not the fish). Thanks to Ken Neill for providing the following photos of some big black drum for this edition of the SWR. If you have never gone drum fishing, you are missing out on one of the true treasures of Virginia’s saltwater fishing.



Flounder continue to produce for anglers, and it is the highlight item for Donna at Captain Bob’s (thanks for the photo Donna!)



After you check out the fishing reports, there are a few other items to keep in mind. The update on the recent blue crab fishery management regulation changes is on page 7 and 8. Also, remember to report your trophy striped bass to VMRC (the trophy fishery began May 1) using either the forms provided (pages 9 and 10), or going online and registering your catch (www.vasaltwaterjournal.com).

For those anglers that want to participate in the Marine Sportfish Collection Project (MSCP), remember that Morningstar Marina at Gwynn's Island (formerly known as the Boatel) has been added on as a site (page 11), and coming soon, Wachapreague Marina will be our newest collection site. The MSCP is so popular at Chris' Bait and Tackle, they have requested a second freezer, as donations are overflowing there! VMRC staff has already sent out the first rewards for donations in 2008, and there already is another staff of forms waiting to be processed as we go to print.

The 2007 age data for cobia, red drum, spadefish, and tautog donated through the MSCP has now been posted at the following website: http://mrc.virginia.gov/rec_assessment/index.shtm. Just look for the Marine Sportfish Collection Project and the 2007 data for the above, and other species, can be found there.

And now, this week's fishing reports!

THE FISHING REPORTS

Chincoteague-

Donna at Captain Bob's Marina is seeing extraordinary flounder action. Expect the flounder to start moving as we near June and warmer water temperatures. Winds are giving fishermen a challenge, but some are able to find protection from the winds in the Assateague Channel. Shockingly, reports are coming in of good fishing near Black Narrows Bridge around the construction site. Donna is hoping for calmer winds and mild temperatures to prolong the flounder fishing there. A croaker citation was issued to Patrick Rogers of Locustville for his 3-pound, 2-ounce, 18-inch catch. The Fingers at Queen Sound is the place to be for fantastic fishing. Seaweed has been a common catch among anglers, with a high throw back ratio adding to the troubles. The baits of choice are the usual minnow, squid, Gulp Alive, and silver sides. The bait with the most success over the week is the double rig, providing a flashy display to attract fish in murky waters.

Wachapreague –

Things have quieted down at Captain Zed's since the flounder tournament. Staff reports that gusty winds have kept most anglers off the water for the week. However, Kyle Janner of Newark, DE, landed a 7-pound, 5-ounce flounder measuring 28 inches. Hopefully the wind will die down and the sun will keep shining.

Chris' Bait and Tackle had an excellent week of fishing. A few speckled trout were caught in the bayside creeks, and flounder are populating seaside at Cape Charles. Very few croaker were seen this week. The big story is that the black drum and red drum are biting hard, with several citations issued over the week. For several anglers, Buoy 16 was the pot of gold for catch and release black drum: William Lewis of Cape Charles (51-inch), Andy Booth of Townsend (52-inch), Dwight Arnold (47 and 51 inches), and John Wandreck (48 and 49 inches). Buoy 13 proved to be the catch and release jackpot for Dale Leonard (50-inch

black drum, 46-inch and 52-inch red drum) and Gerald Beck (50- inch black drum and 50-inch red drum). Clam and peeler crabs are the bait of choice for most going out right now. If black or red drum is your fancy head out to buoys 13 or 16.

Ernie at Cherrystone Bait and Tackle reports that speckled trout are doing well in the shallows. Off Oyster, four citation speckled trout were caught, measuring at 24, 25, 26, and 27 ½ inches. Peeler crabs are beginning to show up in the area. The charter F/V MISS JENNIFER is currently going out for drum, but beginning Memorial Day weekend will be going out for everything. With the water warming up, staff hopes to see a great holiday weekend.

Onancock –

Captain Wil saw one good day of fishing, but very few boats are going out. Strong winds, along with the cost of gas, are keeping most anglers on dry land. There are some nice croaker in the creek, and good size black drum off Onancock. A few flounder are meeting requirements to keep. Striped bass are looking nice, which is good news for the trophy season, which is currently underway.

Lower Bay/Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel –

Cobb's Marina has seen a slow week thanks to windy conditions. Staff are optimistic that the weather will improve and see many anglers heading out for good fishing.

Staff at Salt Ponds Marina are seeing some great flounder fishing, thanks to warmer weather and little rain.

Staff from York River Fishing Center (formally A&S Feed and Bait Supply) are seeing an increase in the croaker population in the York River. Timmy Brown of Gloucester received a citation for the 5-pound, 1-ounce speckled trout he caught on peeler crab in Mobjack Bay. Small flounder are beginning to show up in the mouth of the York River. The bait of choice for most anglers seems to be the usual squid, peeler crab, and bloodworm. Water temperatures continue to warm, with Back River at 68° F and climbing.

Ken Neill, reporting secretary for the Peninsula Anglers Club, contributed the following:

Big black drum have come on strong, joining bull reds as targets for anglers who want to tangle with jumbo-sized fish. Large blacks are being caught on the seaside in the Great Machipongo Inlet. Sea clams and chowder clams are the top baits. The big reds are being caught along the Eastern Shore surf along Fisherman's and Smith Islands and in the 9-Foot-Shoal area. The flounder bite has been spotty with some nice catches coming from Back River Reef. Fishermen are awaiting the arrival of cobia and spadefish with the first cobia having been caught out of Hatteras. Speckled trout are being caught in the Mobjack Bay area, in the inshore waters of the Eastern Shore, both bayside and seaside, on Poquoson Flats and in Back River. Some nice puppy drum action can be found on Poquoson Flats. Offshore boats out of the Outer Banks are having good luck with dolphin, tuna, wahoo, and some billfish. Out of Virginia, offshore fishing consists of bottom fishing for sea bass, tilefish, and grouper.

Dr. Julie Ball, IGFA International Representative for Virginia Beach, contributed the following:

The spring saltwater fishery is escalating, with catches improving most everywhere. And as expected, the emerging drum scene is motivating anglers to gather peelers and clams, and head for the Eastern Shore shoals as the chances of hooking into a trophy drum improve daily. The red drum continue to provide action among the breakers and sloughs near Smith and Fisherman's Island, with scattered reports of bulls also coming from the seaside portion of the Nine Foot Shoal area, especially at night.

The flounder scene is still hit and miss, with the best numbers of keeper fish coming from the Eastern Shore seaside inlets, Oyster, Magothy Bay, and Back River Reef. Tautog are still lurking on lower bay and inshore structures, but these fish are only available for catch and release until late June.

Croaker are hitting in many areas around the lower bay, with the tributary rivers still providing the largest fish. The best hauls from the rivers are coming from the James and York Rivers where squid and crab are doing the trick. The Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel is also giving up croaker, along with the usual mixed bag of schoolie stripers, taylor bluefish, small grey trout, and sea mullet.

Speckled trout anglers are faring well in most all the usual haunts. Both Rudee and Lynnhaven Inlets are producing good numbers of specks ranging 3 to 4-pounds. The Eastern Shore seaside inlets and the back waters of Oyster are also good places to seek out specks using peeler crabs and swimming lures.

Although not stirring much interest, the spring trophy striped bass season is open with nice fish coming mostly from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel area. Jumbo sea bass to over five pounds are still hitting on offshore and inshore wrecks.

Virginia Middle Bay –

Captain Jerry Thrash of Patriot Charters and Queens Creek Outfitters contributed the following:

Wind dampened efforts at saltwater fishing this weekend; we need some sunshine to turn the fish on.

Big croaker are up the rivers. Some 2-pound croakers were caught from docks near New Point this past week, indicating the big fish are entering the creeks and working their way to the Bay. Keeper flounder are moving up the Bay and should be biting at Buoy 40 and the Cell by this weekend. We saw our first big speckled trout from the Piankatank this morning, a pretty 4-pound, 12-ounce fish, which came from a secret dock. Ware Neck is producing speckled trout but we have yet to see

any citations from there.

Rockfish season is finally here and they are cooperating. Jetts Hardware is reporting that rockfish are plentiful in their area. There were fewer reports of croakers this week, but due to the fact that everyone is chasing stripers they are probably still there doing their thing. Also a few rumors of speckled trout in the Rappahannock River floating around, and with how secretive speck fishermen are you have to take these kinds of rumors with a grain of salt.

Smith Point Marina has also seen good numbers of rockfish. They also say that they are a good size so be sure to leave the light tackle at home.

Locklies and Garretts Marina both report the croaker run is still going strong and can be found in shallow and deep water. It doesn't matter what you use for bait as they appear to be quite hungry.

Captain Jim, fishing out of Deltaville, provided the following report:

Yesterday we had a very good day on croaker at Butler's Hole, in the Rappahannock River, off Windmill Point Marina. It was all drift fishing and the croaker were mostly medium in size with a few large ones mixed in as well. Squid and blood worms were the bait of choice as the water temperature hit 68. There were other groups of fish around but the hole was the best yesterday. That might change as the weather is supposed to change today. In the catch were nice sized mullet, spot and some baby cobia that were released. In the bay, off Gwynns Island, it was off and on but some croaker are there and the tide was just too fast to get a good drift. On the Eastern Shore the net fishing is good, and with temperature warming up we will be trying that area soon for big croaker and dog fish. Flounder are at the Cell but no monsters yet. Some blues are in the area but not in great numbers. Catfish and croaker are in the Urbanna Flats all the way to Waterview in shallow water.

Virginia Beach –

Virginia Beach Fishing Center reports large numbers of taylor bluefish and flounder in the inlet. Puppy drum (juvenile red drum), black drum, and red drum are beginning to parade into the area. The headboats are seeing black sea bass, grouper, and tilefish offshore. Private charters are having luck with striped bass in the bay, kicking off a good start to the trophy season.

Staff at Fisherman's Wharf Marina are reporting little activity, but say the offshore black sea bass fishing is doing really well.

Virginia Piers –

Staff at the Ocean View Pier report the first flounder keeper coming in at 21 inches, caught on squid. Spot

and croaker action heats up in the evening and at night. More and more red drum and trout are being seen, though on the small side.

The Lynnhaven Fishing Pier opened for the season on May 2nd, and things got off to a pretty good start. Flounder, roundhead, spot, and croaker were the fish caught during the week. Flounder is the popular catch at the pier. The Bay temperature is warming up nicely, 66° F and rising.

The Virginia Beach Pier is being taunted by skates and sand sharks, who are a nuisance to those trying to fish. A 30-inch juvenile red drum, along with a 9-pound black drum, was caught during the week. Staff are gearing up for the upcoming holiday weekend, planning to be open 24-hours a day.

The Sandbridge Pier reports little activity, except for the abundant number of bluefish.

Outer Banks, NC –

Fishing is improving all along the Outer Banks with improving weather and water conditions. Water temp has reached 58° F degrees in the surf at Kill Devil Hills.

Nags Head Area

Offshore boats have been landing yellow and blackfin tuna as well as a host of different species including dolphin, little tunny, wahoo and amberjack. Some of the dolphin have been reaching citation size but most were in the gaffer (15 to 20 pounds) range. There was a report of a 600-pound blue marlin brought boat side as well. Deep water bottom fishermen have been able to find sea bass and tilefish.

People fishing closer to shore, out to two miles, have been able to find striped bass. The inshore story has been speckled trout with red drum starting to show up as well. The hot spots for these critters have been the Melvin Daniels Bridge and the Washington Baum Bridge. Some striped bass are being caught as well, albeit on the small side. People are also landing sheepshead and trigger fish around the pilings of the Oregon Inlet Bridge.

The piers have continued to see good numbers of speckled sea trout, bluefish and sea mullet. The trout were being caught in the mornings while the bluefish and sea mullet could be found throughout the day. Other species being caught include burrfish, spot, croaker and assorted sharks and rays.

South of Oregon Inlet

One person's comment summed up the sentiment for the shore fishermen; "They're here!" Big red drum have started to work into the Cape Point area with at least one measuring 50 inches, and 20+ "big ones" landed Friday night alone. There was even a rumor of a cobia being caught. The fishing elsewhere is also improving with sea mullet and blowfish on the south and north beaches along with bluefish hitting spoons.

Hatteras Inlet

Offshore fishermen have good luck chasing dolphin and have also managed to find some scattered wahoo,

yellowfin tuna, blackfin tuna and a few billfish. Sound fishing continues to produce bluefish and the occasional speckled trout.

If you have additional information or would like further details contact Joe Grist at (757) 247-2237.

Please credit the Virginia Marine Resources Commission's THE SALTWATER REVIEW as the source of the fishing information.

For immediate release
April 22, 2008

Contact: John M.R. Bull
757-247-2269 (office)
757-509-0969 (cell)

NEWPORT NEWS, VA. – Virginia fishery regulators have voted to cut the crab harvest by 34 percent this year, partly by abolishing the winter dredging of hibernating crabs and by closing the season for female crabs a month early.

A series of harvest restrictions passed Tuesday by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission were in an effort to shore up a Chesapeake Bay blue crab population that has been teetering on the edge of collapse for several years.

“The scientific data is overwhelming and without doubt identifies a problem that must be addressed decisively,” said VMRC Commissioner Steven G. Bowman. “To delay or to take half measures would be irresponsible.”

The latest Bay-wide crab population survey, released last week, shows the number of crabs dropped by 16.1 percent below the already dangerously low levels documented over the past decade.

The survey prompted Maryland to agree to a 34 percent cut in that state’s crab harvest, through measures to be enacted in the next few weeks. The governors of both states support the cutbacks.

The nine-member VMRC board led the way in voting Tuesday to:

- Eliminate Virginia’s winter dredge season for the 53 watermen licensed to participate in that fishery.
- Close the season for the taking of female crabs as of Oct. 27. The state’s crab pot season normally closes on Nov. 30.
- Abolish the recreational crab pot license, which allowed up to five pots per license holder. Current law allows Virginia residents to set up to two crab pots without a license.
- Reduce the number of crab pots and peeler pots permitted per license by 30 percent as of next year, and by 15 and 30 percent respectively this May. The number of pots currently allowed per license ranges from 100 to 500.
- Require two additional, wider crab pot escape rings -- known as cull rings -- as of July 1, except the seaside of the Eastern Shore. At that time, two cull rings in a crab pot must be $2 \frac{3}{8}$ ths of an inch in diameter, in addition to the currently required rings of $2 \frac{3}{16}$ ths and $2 \frac{5}{16}$ ths of an inch. This will allow larger crabs to escape.

The Commission also voted to summon any watermen convicted of two crab conservation violations in a one-year period before the board for a license revocation hearing.

Perhaps the most contentious of the regulations was the decision to the end the dredging of crabs in the winter.

Between half to three-quarters of the crabs dug out of the sand and mud in the winter are either cut up, smashed, or killed – just a few months before they emerge to spawn. Of the 300 comments received by VMRC in the past few months, a clear majority favored abolishing the wasteful winter dredge season.

The Commission formally asked for state assistance, if available, for crab dredgers who will be out of work this winter as a result of regulation changes.

The new harvest restrictions came on top of other VMRC regulation changes over the past two months aimed at protecting the blue crab, including:

- Prohibiting anyone else from entering the winter crab dredge season and capping the current

number of licensed dredgers at 53.

- Requiring both cull rings on crab pots to be open at all times. One had been allowed to be closed in certain locations.
- Increase the minimum size of peeler crabs from 3 inches to 3.25 inches until July 15 and then to 3.5 inches for the rest of the season. This matched Maryland's regulations.
- Allow only one other person to be authorized to work a waterman's crab pots, instead of the many that had been allowed.

Despite conservation measures taken by Virginia and Maryland over the past decade, and lowered crab harvest targets set year after year, the total Bay-wide harvest of crabs dropped from 89 million pounds in 1997 to 44 million pounds last year.

And still the abundance of crabs in the Chesapeake Bay remains 70 percent lower than population estimates in the early 1990s.

Water quality, oxygen dead zones, loss of underwater grass beds that shelter juvenile crabs likely played a role in the drastic reduction of the Bay's crab population.

But scientific data shows that overfishing has played a role as well.

Total crab harvest targets in Virginia have been exceeded in 12 of the past 16 years, and overfishing has cut into the species' ability to reproduce in eight of the past 11 years.

Because the crab's life cycle takes it from the ocean, through the lower Chesapeake Bay and into Maryland's waters, both states decided to work together to find a Bay-wide solution.

"We hope and expect that acting together we can turn this around," Bowman said. "The crab is resilient and a prolific breeder, and our actions should save the species and rebuild the population so that harvest levels for our watermen will return to where they should be."

SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF RECREATIONAL CRAB POTS

The Commission eliminated the 5-pot commercial license for recreational purposes, effective May 1, 2008. After May 1, 2008, no license to take crabs, by crab pot, for recreational or personal use, shall be issued, and any license purchased, prior to May 1, shall be null and void.

Section §28.2-226 of the Code of Virginia still provides an exemption for licensing requirements for the following activities:

1. Except as otherwise provided by regulation, taking by dip net, hand line, or two crab pots, as much as one bushel of hard crabs and two dozen peeler crabs in any one day for personal use only.

The Commission also deemed that statewide, except for the Seaside of Eastern Shore—by emergency Regulation, effective July 1, 2008, two 2 3/8-inch cull rings are required, in addition to the 2 5/16" and 2 3/16" cull rings that are already required. All 4 cull rings are to be open in any crab pot placed, set or fished in any tidal waters, except the Seaside of Eastern Shore where pots shall contain a 2 3/16" and 2 5/16" cull ring, both to be open.

Remember, buoys of any crab pot, used for recreational purposes, shall be marked with the licensee's last 4 numbers of his or her social security number or driver's license number, preceded by the letter "R". And you must follow all minimum size limits and season restrictions that apply to the commercial fishery, including, no harvest of female blue crabs beginning October 27 through December 31.

2008 STRIPED BASS RECREATIONAL TROPHY REPORT

FORM

**THIS REPORT MUST BE FILLED OUT AND MAILED OR HAND
DELIVERED TO VMRC NO LATER THAN JUNE 30, 2008.**

Each fisherman, captain, or boat operator is responsible for complying with all restrictions and requirements contained in regulation 4VAC 20-252-10 ET SEQ. Regulation 4VAC 20-252-10 ET SEQ. requires all striped bass kept during the trophy season be reported.

**** This page is for summary purposes only ****

FISHING SEASONS: Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries--May 1 (12:01 AM) - June 15 (11:59 PM), 2008
Coastal Virginia waters--May 1 (12:01 AM) - May 15 (11:59 PM), 2008
Potomac River tributaries--April 19 (12:01 AM) - May 15 (11:59 PM), 2008

TROPHY POSSESSION SIZE: 32-inch minimum; except for Potomac River Tributaries, where there is a 28 minimum.

POSSESSION LIMIT: 1 trophy-size fish per person. When fishing from a boat or vessel, where the entire catch is held in a common hold or container, the possession limit shall be for the boat or vessel and shall be equal to the number of persons on board, legally eligible to fish, multiplied by the applicable personal possession limit. The captain or operator of the boat or vessel shall be responsible for any boat or vessel possession limit.

GEAR: Hook and Line fishing only

NO SALE OF HOOK & LINE CAUGHT STRIPED BASS

NO POSSESSION of Trophy striped bass in the spawning reaches (defined below) May 1 through June 15.

- James River - from a line connecting Dancing Point and New Sunken Meadow Creek upstream to a line connecting City Point and Packs Point.
- Pamunkey River - from the Route 33 Bridge at West Point upstream to a line connecting Liberty Hall and the opposite shore.
- Mattaponi River - from the Route 33 Bridge at West Point upstream to the Route 360 Bridge at Aylett.
- Rappahannock River - from the Route 360 Bridge at Tappahannock upstream to the Route 1 Bridge at Falmouth.
- Alteration of striped bass while aboard any boat or vessel or while fishing from shore or pier so that total length cannot be determined is prohibited.
- Spearing or gaffing or attempting to spear or gaff striped bass is prohibited.
- Transfer of any striped bass to another person while on the water or while fishing from a pier or shore is prohibited.
- Striped bass fishing is prohibited in Federal waters (beyond the Virginia three-mile limit line).

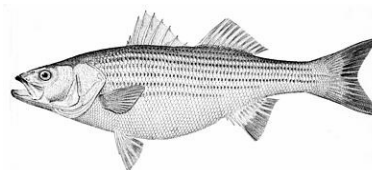
REPORT FORM HELPFUL HINTS:

- You must include length information on each trophy size striped bass that is kept.
- VMRC would appreciate any length information on striped bass that are released, please see the other side of this form.
- Lengths are total lengths in inches (to nearest 1/4 inch). Total length is measured in a straight line from tip of nose to tip of tail.
- Weights (in pounds) are optional
- TO REPORT REGULATION VIOLATIONS: 1-800-541-4646
- TROPHY REPORTING QUESTIONS: 1-800-937-9247

RETURN FORM TO:

**VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
PLANS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT
2600 WASHINGTON AVENUE, 3RD FLOOR
NEWPORT NEWS VA 23607-0756**

On-line reporting is available:



www.vasaltwaterjournal.com

2008 RECREATIONAL TROPHY STRIPED BASS SEASON REPORT FORM

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

NAME: _____

(USE AS MANY FORMS AS NECESSARY)










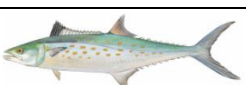
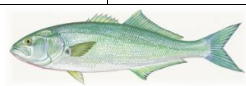
DATE	WATER BODY WHERE FISH WERE CAUGHT	NUMBER OF STRIPED BASS CAUGHT	NUMBER OF STRIPED BASS KEPT

[illegible]

**THE VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
WANTS YOUR FISH....
TO MEASURE AND AGE.**

*You catch it, you fillet it,
but instead of throwing the remains in the trash,
please donate them to science.*

The Marine Sportfish Collection Project will focus on species of fish that are difficult to collect through the agency's normal sampling program. Anglers are asked to donate their filleted carcasses (head and tail intact) of legal and fresh-caught:

COBIA		RED DRUM	
SHEEPSHEAD		BLACK DRUM	
SPADEFISH		TAUTOG	
TILEFISH		GROUPE	
KING MACKEREL		SPANISH MACKEREL	
BLUEFISH (OVER 16 POUNDS OR 36 INCHES)			

In return for participating in the project, the agency will provide a
ONE FREE PROJECT TEE SHIRT or HAT FOR EACH PARTICIPANT, PER MONTH.

Please visit these bait and tackle merchants to participate:

Bell Isle Marine (Hampton)

Chris' Bait and Tackle (Capeville)

Long Bay Pointe Marina (Virginia Beach)

Morningstar Marina – Gwynn's Island (formerly known as the Gwynn's Island Boatel)



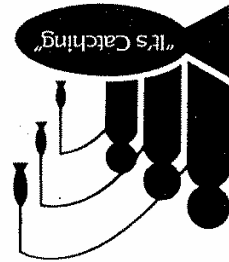
Website: http://mrc.virginia.gov/rec_assessment/index.shtm

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Practice

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